

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of January 8, 2009

Fourth Floor Conference Room
Union Station, New Haven

Attendance: Members: Mort Katz, Terry Hall, Rich Sunderhauf, Rick Schreiner, Kevin Maloney, Alan Sylvestre, Yvonne Loteczka, Richard Caprenter. **Ex-officio members:** Susan Simmat (OPM), Connie Mendolia (DEP), Fred Riese (DEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Dennis King. **Guests:** Leo Petry

Vice chairman Morton Katz opened the meeting at 1:30 pm. The minutes of the meeting of December 4 were accepted as written.

Comments from the Public

None.

Reports from Operating Entities

Richard Schreiner reported that ridership on the Harlem Line shuttles continues to increase. Ridership on the Ridgefield-Katonah shuttle was up 25% for the year 2008 over 2007, while the Brewster shuttle ridership increased 16% for 2008. Rick cautioned that transit ridership trends are generally 6-9 months behind other economic indicators and, thus, a ridership downturn might be coming. He also expects to see some trimming in the levels of municipal support for HART's operations.

Richard Sunderhuaf mentioned that a new round of run bids for the Hartford Division of Connecticut Transit will occur on February 1. Connecticut Transit conducts run bids three or four times a year. Rick Schreiner noted that HART undergoes run bids annually.

Susan Simmat said that Cambridge Systematics has completed its study on tolling on Connecticut's highways. The Transportation Strategy Board will formulate recommendations based on the study for submission to Governor Rell.

Fred Riese mentioned that Chop Hardenbergh, editor of Atlantic Northeast Rails and Ports, noticed that the requirement for the Commissioner of DOT to submit responses to the recommendations contained in the CPTC Annual Report by February 1 was no longer in the statute. A review of the matter determined that Special Act 03-04 had added the Transportation Strategy Board as a mandated recipient of the Annual Report and had deleted the requirement that the Commissioner respond to the Annual Report recommendations by February 1, replacing it with a requirement that he notify various legislative committees by January 1 of the availability of the department's responses. This would be practically impossible given that the Commission doesn't submit its report until January 1. Dennis King said that the department was not aware of this change until

Fred's e-mail of earlier in the week, and it intended to submit its responses by February 1 as it typically has done.

Riese also mentioned that ConnDOT was conducting a planning charrette on the Waterbury Branch rail study at the department on January 22. A similar effort for the New Canaan Branch is scheduled for January 12 at the DOT headquarters.

Fred took responsibility for the fact that Chairman Cheeseman, Russ St. John and today's scheduled speaker Michael Krauss were at the ConnDOT offices in Newington today instead of here at the meeting in New Haven. Fred had published the original agenda with the meeting location shown as Newington, which has been the customary location for the January meeting. A revised agenda with the corrected meeting location had been send out but apparently not all the members had received this revision.

Lastly, Fred promised to assemble a list of suggested sites for the spring public hearings for consideration at the February meeting.

New Business

Dick Carpenter presented a copy of Volume 3 of the *Railroad Atlas of the United States, 1946* covering Ohio, Indiana, the lower peninsula of Michigan, and Chicago. Volume 3 was published last month. Dick is already at work on Volume 4 of the atlas.

The audit requested by Governor Rell for the proposed New Haven Yard rail maintenance facilities has been completed. The study identified significant cost savings that could be realized by delaying some components of the project and eliminating some others. Among the suggested changes to the project are upgrading rather than replacing the existing repair shop, scaling back work on a new paint shop and heavy repair facility, scaling back work on the wheel maintenance shop, and purchasing or leasing offsite warehouse and parking facilities rather than constructing them on the rail yard property. Mort Katz requested an update from the department on this issue at the February meeting.

Terry Hall reported that Amtrak is being hit by the slowing economy, especially on the Northeast Corridor. ACELA Express ridership is down 16% from this summer's levels. Amtrak ridership had been increasing up through the summer. Amtrak is now offering some special fares to try to boost ridership again. One bright spot has been long distance travel, which is still holding up well.

Terry also mentioned that the National Corridors Initiative will be holding a meeting in New London tomorrow. Also, Congress has asked Amtrak to do a study of the improvements required for the northern and southern halves of the Northeast Corridor to improve travel time. One element Amtrak is planning between New York and Washington is a new tunnel through Baltimore to eliminate a bottleneck there. In New York City, Amtrak is looking at replacing the Portal Bridge between Newark and NYC with two new bridges of expanded capacity.

Alan Sylvestre noted that the latest estimates for the cost of the New Britain Busway are up to \$570 million and that some legislators have suggested that the line be designed as a light rail project instead of a busway. Fred Riese noted that ConnDOT is still proceeding with the busway project and has a timetable for its completion. He said the proposal to convert it to light rail would be a death sentence for the project as this would entail higher costs and would set the design effort back considerably.

Vice chairman Katz adjourned the meeting at 2:17 pm.